

the Red Sea than northern Iran. Von Heuglin (Archer & Godman 1937) suspected that it might breed by the Red Sea, and Nicholl (Meinertzhagen 1930) had suggested that it bred on the Egyptian Red Sea coast. Although birds which appeared too young to have migrated from Asiatic breeding grounds were noted by a number of writers, the only breeding record was a sighting by Archer (*l.c.*) of a downy chick with adult birds at Saad Din Island, Somalia, on 15th July (year not stated). In the absence of other possible species one can reasonably suspect that the eggs collected by Drake-Brockman were those of a local breeding population of *C. leschenaultii*. The date at which they were taken is early in the year, but the Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, was also breeding at this period.

N.B. I am grateful to Dr. C. Vaurie for the information that, in examining recent Russian literature of the Charadriiformes, he finds that doubt has been thrown on the authenticity of the Asiatic eggs with which the clutch described here has been compared. In these circumstances it is possible that no genuine material is available for comparison and it would be unwise to place too much reliance on this earlier description.

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A note on the habits of *Mayrornis schistaceus* Mayr (Muscicapidae) of the South-West Pacific

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The S.W. Pacific genus *Mayrornis* Wetmore comprises three small, predominantly slate-grey monarchine flycatchers: *lessoni* (Gray), (Fijian group), *versicolor* Mayr (Ongea Levu, Fiji) and *schistaceus* Mayr (Vanikoro, Santa Cruz group). Detailed descriptions of the three species will be found in Mayr (1933, pp. 17-20).

Little is known of this genus apart from skins. E. Layard (1876, pp. 144-5) described a nest and eggs of *lessoni* collected at Ngila on Taviuni, on 23rd July 1875. The nest was composed entirely of rootlets and thickly covered with the yellow cocoons of a common large spider. The nest site was not mentioned. The two eggs, which are now in the British Museum of Natural History (B.M. No. 1901. 12. 5. 212-3) were redescribed by Oates (1903, p. 267); they are fairly glossy and have a creamy white ground with spots and speckles of purplish-brown and lilac-grey forming a zone or cap at the large end and one or two speckles elsewhere on the surface. Measurements in mm. 18.35 x 14, 18.5 x 14.4. Measurements of the nest as given by Layard (changed here to mm.) are: external diam. 68, internal diam. 45, ext. depth 89, int. depth 45. Nehr-korn (1910, p. 186) stated eggs of *lessoni* to be white with dark brown spots in a close and sharply demarcated zone, and to measure 18-19 x 13.5 mm.

Mayr (1945) records *lessoni* as being a bird of the substage in lowland and mountain forest, whose habits are apparently similar to those of *Monarcha*, but which sometimes spreads the tail like a fan. The species

has a rasping alarm note. No data on habits are given for *M. versicolor*, and the habits of *M. schistaceus* are said to be unknown.

Observations

The following notes on *M. schistaceus* are based on observations made by C. J. Hadley, a forestry officer, on Vanikoro in 1955. His field notes and a nest and photograph of the species are deposited at the B.M. (N.H.).

This species, whose common name is Slaty Flycatcher, is often met with in the forest. Its total length is 6 in. It is slate-grey all over, slightly paler towards the crissum. The tail, which is black, is held vertically, like a Wren's, and often spread *Rhipidura*-fashion to reveal the whitish tips to some of the rectrices. The beak is fairly long. The bird is silent except for a call 'chrrr' and a plaintive 't'lyoo' at the nest. Its mode of feeding is to spiral up around a small tree, hopping from branch to branch and then flying to the next tree. One individual was seen to extract something, probably a small insect, from the bark. The social relationship between the Slaty Flycatcher and the Rufous-fronted Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*), about the commonest small bird on Vanikoro, appears to be very close, as Hadley often observed individuals or small groups of the former closely followed by one or more of the latter, "exactly like a male following a female". A nest was found on 3rd June, in secondary forest, still being built. It was 6ft. above the ground in a large-leaved shrub. The nest is now in the B.M. (N.H.) (B.M. No. N.85. 1). It is a flimsy cup built into a three-pronged fork of the main stem. The basal half of the fork is incorporated into the nest, but the three branches emerge about half way up through the nest wall and are in contact with the nest externally as far as the rim. The body of the nest comprises dry vegetable fibre and thin herbaceous stems and leaf blades. The cup is lined with long, dark animal hairs (wild pig?); the outside is covered with a quantity of moss (*Neckeropsis lepineana* and *Floribundaria floribunda*), and decorated with white petal-like pieces of fungus skin. Measurements in mm.: ext. diam. 71, int. diam. 48, ext. depth 61, int. depth 35. Both birds were seen going to the nest with lining for the interior and would put this in place with the beak, then get down in the nest to mould the inside with the body. They would then abruptly leave the nest, plunging over the side in contrast to their more hesitant approach, possibly due to the presence of an observer. On 8th June there was no egg. On 10th June one of the birds was sitting and the nest contained one egg, which was about $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long and had a cream ground tinged with pink, with fine, dense red-brown markings at the large end. From 11th to 29th June the parents took turns to incubate. No observation was made on 30th June, but on 1st July the egg had hatched. On 13th July there was "No chick, no parents, no nothing. Perhaps some disaster happened. There are quite a few tree snakes here". Another nest was found being built on 20th September. It was about 6ft. up in primary forest. This nest, which was accidentally hacked to the ground during track-cutting operations, was more heavily decorated with the white fungus skin than the first.

Discussion

The feeding behaviour of *Mayrornis schistaceus* is typical of most of the monarchine genera. Although feeding-party associations amongst small birds are common, one would expect more species and individuals to be

involved than Hadley mentions, and it is more likely that in this case the stimulus which causes the fantail to follow the flycatcher is the latter's behavioural, and to a lesser extent morphological, resemblance to a young *Rhipidura*. The role of *schistaceus* in this relationship appears to be a purely passive one. The well-documented case of Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*) following Golden plovers (*Pluvialis apricaria*) around like shadows on the breeding grounds is reminiscent of this situation.

It is the tail-posture (see sketch) which is of particular interest, insofar as it is not typically monarchine. The Hawaiian monarchine genus *Chasiempis* is another recorded as carrying the tail upright. While searching for food amongst the underbrush and foliage, members of this genus characteristically droop and quiver the wings and erect the fanned tail almost vertically over the back (Perkins 1903, pp. 379-80; Peterson 1961, p. 327). Some species of *Clytorhynchus*, the shrike-billed monarchs, spread the tail when excited and flick it up and down (Mayr 1945, p. 141). *Mayrornis lessoni*, as has already been mentioned, sometimes spreads the tail like a fan. Of the genus *Trochocercus*, which is closely related to *Terpsiphone*, the species *cyanomelas* and *nitens* habitually fan the tail and droop the wings as they move about searching for food (Chapin 1953). Of the above-mentioned species, *Chasiempis*, *Mayrornis* and most forms of *Clytorhynchus* have white- or pale-tipped rectrices which show to advantage only when the tail is so fanned. The tail-posture of *Mayrornis* is thus not as unusual as it may at first seem when the above examples are also considered.

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Characteristic posture of
Mayrornis schistaceus

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Notes on a White-eyed Pochard x Marbled Teal hybrid

by BRYAN L. SAGE

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So far as I have been able to ascertain only one intergeneric cross involving the Marbled Teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris* [Menetries]) has ever been recorded, and that refers to a captive cross with the White-eyed